DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 207 CS 510 389

AUTHOR	Rosengard, Dana
TITLE	Mid-Career Interning: Faculty Going from Classroom to Newsroom. A Pilot Study.
PUB DATE	2000-08-11
NOTE	20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (83rd, Phoenix, AZ, August 9-12, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Faculty; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; *Journalism Education; Journalism Research; *News Media; Pilot Projects
IDENTIFIERS	North Carolina; *Television News

ABSTRACT

Every year, thousands of college students head to television newsrooms to work as interns to learn from the professionals. Back on campus, they sit in classes and listen to professors who, many times, have not been in a television newsroom themselves for years and years. This research looks at faculty internships. In this pilot-study, the television news directors in North Carolina were surveyed to learn if they would welcome such interns into their newsroom, what they would allow them to do, how they see the college or university faculty intern as both a challenge and a risk. Results indicated that news directors would welcome the wisdom and contributions of mid-career interns. Included in this research are lessons learned from a small sample of faculty who have devoted part of their summer breaks working back in the field. Contains 15 references and 4 unnumbered tables of data. (RS)

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Mid-Career Interning:

faculty going from classroom to newsroom

a pilot study

Dana Rosengard
Ph.D. Student & Park Fellow
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Post Office Box 547
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
919-967-6680
danar@unc.edu

presentation at the AEJMC Convention
Phoenix, Arizona
August 11, 2000
Internships and Placement Interest Group

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D. Rosengard

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Mid-Career Interning:
faculty going from classroom to newsroom

ABSTRACT

Every year, thousands of college students head to television newsrooms to work as interns to learn from the professionals. Back on campus, they sit in classes and listen to professors who, many times, have not been in a television newsroom themselves for years and years.

This research looks at faculty internships. In this pilot-study, the television news directors in North Carolina were surveyed to learn if they would welcome such interns into their newsroom, what they would allow them to do, how they see the college or university faculty intern as both a challenge and a risk. Included in this research are lessons learned from a small sample of faculty who have devoted part of their summer breaks working back in the field.

CONTEXT & SIGNIFICANCE

Established in 1950, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is dedicated to the highest standards of journalistic excellence. Toward that end, the Foundation awards grants in journalism education, more than $120 million since the Foundation was created (www.knightfnd).

In the fall of 1999, the Knight Foundation awarded $950,000 for mid-career journalism training to the Radio Television News Directors Foundation. RTNDF will use the money for the Project for Excellence in Journalism Education, an initiative to enhance the quality of broadcast journalism education and to strengthen the caliber of the future broadcast workforce (www.knightfnd).

Specifically, the three-year project will use the funds to send broadcast journalism educators back to work in newsrooms for four weeks during summers beginning in 2000. RTNDF President Barbara Cochran says the goal of the program is to strengthen ties between journalism educators and television journalists (www.rtnda.org).

That tie is well documented as a necessary connection in the science of education. Widely recognized national educational leader Ernest Boyer called on all faculty, throughout their careers, to remain students. As scholars, Boyer said, faculty members must continue to learn and be seriously and continuously engaged in the expanding intellectual world (p. 131). Respected educator Parker J. Palmer agrees, adding that no

matter how we devote ourselves to reading and research, teaching requires a command of content that always eludes our grasp (p. 2).

PROBLEM & METHODOLOGY

In few fields might this be more true than in that of broadcast journalism. The art and science of electronic news gathering changes at a pace dictated by technology. Ken Bode, dean of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, describes television as both the predominant and most trusted news source among media consumers (www.knightfnd). The economics of the television news industry includes great financial reward for the inventors and manufacturers of equipment and practice that brings speed to both the delivery of the product and the profits the deliverers realize.

Students by the thousands, a growing wave of young minds, want to tap into this excitement and promise. Colleges and universities across the country have answered their call, giving birth to long lists of academic curricula addressing the interest. 1997 listings show more than 2,000 academic degree programs that easily lead to potential careers in broadcast journalism (Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges):

academic major	*# of schools offering 4-year degrees in this field*
Communication	1,000
Journalism	491
Broadcasting	303
Radio & Television	274
Telecommunications	100
Film & Video Production	83

Hundreds of faculty members teach in these departments and face the challenge of preparing the future reporters, producers, anchors, writers, graphic designers, photographers, editors, technicians, and managers who will control the message, again, that Northwestern's Bode says is more dominant than any other. These faculty members

must stay abreast of new concepts and technologies, and take that new know-how back to their classrooms. The Knight Foundation-supported RTNDF program is designed to do just that: keep the professors working, keep them in the know.

Prior to this big-name, big-push program, individual, aggressive, college faculty members have arranged for classroom-to-newsroom experiences on their own. Those identified, say renewed content knowledge initially drove their desire for the back-to-the-real-word experience.

This research will document a small selection of recent, small-scale, and pre-Knight Foundation-supported, classroom-to-newsroom experiences. The route taken to secure the work, the objectives, goals and responsibilities will be explored. In addition, potential managers of a growing wave of college faculty looking to ride a new wave of experience and technology will be questioned. This pilot-study will try to determine the willingness of news directors to take on these part-time, second-time-around news professionals. The news directors will be asked about the accessibility to responsibility for these mid-career interns.

This research will be aimed at answering the following questions:

- Will news directors welcome the wisdom and contributions of mid-career interns?
- Are news directors likely to set limits as to the role and responsibilities they will afford mid-career interns?
- What do news directors see as the potential difficulties and potential benefits of having a mid-career intern in their newsroom?
- Do news directors think mid-career internships are valuable and important?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Little has been written specifically on mid-career broadcast journalism internships for college faculty. What was discovered during this literature review of scholarly journals, mainstream publications, trade periodicals, academic documents, and general circulation newspapers was more than fifteen years old. Even then, it was noted that if professors with broadcast experience do not keep working in the area, their skills will become outdated because of rapidly expanding technology (Gotsch, 1983). To upgrade professional skills, a university teacher needs to involve himself/herself in various kinds of broadcasting activities, including working at a station (Gotsch, 1983). In 1979, University of South Carolina journalism professor Lee Dudek found himself working at a station, back in the field for a summer experience that helped to disprove the idiom, "Those who can't, teach" (Dickey, 1979).

"Old gray-headed professors are returning to the fountain of youth to learn the new editing and ENG (electronic news gathering) equipment," Dudek said of his summer experience (Dickey, 1979).

Back in the late 70's and early 80's, electronic news gathering was moving through the latest of its many technical revolutions, finishing a transition from film to videotape and greatly increasing the use of live, or remote, broadcasting. Machinery was getting smaller and more sophisticated, more time being freed up for news gathering instead of news processing. Then and now, the importance of faculty internships in technological fields like broad casting is obvious. The technology is changing so fast that faculty members must keep themselves up to date as to its use. Constant professional development is required (Gotsch, 1983) and, in fact, internships can be arranged to develop certain skill areas for the faculty member (Goadkoop, 1983). Internships in other

fields have also shown they give teachers a new appreciation for career fields (Beason, 1996).

Leading academic scholars have made mention of theories and beliefs that support a mid-career faculty internship program. Passion for the subject, Parker J. Palmer writes, propels that subject, not the teacher, into the center of the learning circle (Palmer, 1998). Echoes nationally recognized educational leader Ernest Boyer, "(I) strongly recommend that every college commit itself to the professional growth of all faculty and provide them with opportunities to stay intellectually alive (Boyer, 1987)."

"Clearly, faculty must remain intellectually alive, stay abreast of developments in their fields," Boyer wrote.

The mid-career broadcast journalism internship for college faculty, of course, has benefits to more than just the faculty member. Other big winners are the students of the individual faculty member. Generally, part of the payoff of programs outside the broadcast journalism field is enabling teachers to serve as role models by sharing their on-the-job knowledge with students when back in the classroom (Beason, 1996). Of course this can also be said for students headed into television who benefit along with the broadcast industry which is happy with graduates coming from departments where faculty members have day to day experience in broadcasting (Gotsch, 1983).

Of course, today, as broadcast charges into the digital world, that is even more true. And so, to upgrade professional skills, a university teacher needs to involve him or herself in various kinds of broadcasting activities, including working at a station, in a newsroom. And so, there are or have been professional programs for continuing education opportunities for college faculty.

The National Association of Television Programming Executives (NATPE) sponsors a grant program to support college and university media educators the opportunity to gain first-hand experience in a professional media environment. Through

its Educational Foundation founded in 1978, NATPE reaches out to members, the academic community, and students to help prepare them for a future in television. Specifically, the faculty development grant program affords selected professors financial support and placement for two to eight weeks in television stations or related companies to observe and participate in "real world" day-to-day operations. The program is designed to increase teaching effectiveness through professional experience and, though not designed exclusively for news experiences, many of the grant recipients do spend some time in newsrooms.

Writings on the NATPE and other, similar professional organization programs appear to be confined to association public relation pieces, personnel files, or self-evaluation tenure reports. However, recent participants report through non-published writing great value in the program including several who supplied this author, directly, with descriptions of their experiences.

"(The program) brought me up to date on many of today's newsroom activities and let me quiz folks doing different jobs about a what they were doing, how they liked it, what they disliked and what students need to know," reports Sandy Ellis of the Department of Journalism at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Dr. Ellis participated in the NATPE grant program in 1997, working for four weeks at KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh.

"It re-energized me in the classroom, gave me new stories and examples, provided lots of tape to show and increased my respect for today's TV news professionals," Ellis reports.

Ellis' experience proves the theoretical support for such back-to-work experiences. Research on student ratings of teaching as well as on student learning indicates that the enthusiasm of the lecturer is an important factor in effecting student learning and motivation (McKeachie, p. 55). Research on teaching and learning

underscores the important relationship between content knowledge and teaching effectiveness (DeZure, p. 9). All members of the faculty should work continually to improve the content of their courses and their methods of instruction (Boyer, 159).

Jack Hodgson is an Associate Professor in the School of Journalism and Broadcasting at Oklahoma State University. He has completed several back-to-the-real-world experiences since joining the academic ranks, including a NATPE placement. Most of his time has been spent in news departments, the area in which he primarily teaches, including placements at stations in Tulsa, Minneapolis, and Oklahoma City.

"I went out with reporters and videographers, wrote news copy, worked with producers and participated in news meetings," Hodgson reports.

"I greatly enjoyed the experiences, made some very useful professional contacts, and have a lot of material to share with my students."

Again, his experiences speak to educational theories and beliefs. One of the top qualities students believe to be related to superior teaching is knowledge of subject matter (McKeachie). Knowledge and love of the content, combined, is one of the five research-identified components of effective instruction (Weimer, p. 2).

The Cable News Network in Atlanta had a three-month program for visiting professors. Under the faculty fellowship program, college and university faculty members spent two months observing all the different areas of the network then chose the one area in which they most wanted to work for their last month's assignment. Over the three years of the program, about a dozen broadcast journalists made the move from their classrooms to the CNN newsrooms. CNN executives say the goal of the program was quite simply to give the faculty members hands-on and updated experience in the newsroom.

"Many of the professors didn't work in the newsroom for a long time. This (program) gave than an opportunity to gain more experience and get them up to date with

the latest newsgathering process and news production," reports Willie Jenkins, CNN hands-on coordinator of the student internship program.

Charles Caudill started the faculty fellowship program at CNN five years ago. But two years ago, he changed roles at the network and didn't have time or staff to continue it. No one at CNN can quite figure out why the program was just dropped.

And so, for the most part, it is the responsibility of individual college and university faculty to make their own opportunities to update their skills inventory and re-energize their passion for broadcast journalism.

James Gorham is a professor of broadcasting, film, and speech at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. This past summer he spent one month back in the working world at KSWO-TV7 in Lawton, Oklahoma, 45 miles from his north-central Texas campus. He arranged the opportunity by contacting the news director at KSWO directly.

"They were thrilled that a professor was going to join them for a month. I wasn't exactly your typical intern coming from college. The problem is that they always treated me like a professor and never as an intern. I ended up being more of a consultant for them than an intern," Gorham remembers.

He says he ended up just "shadowing" the reporters much of the time but that he did, "learn a few new tricks of the trade. I learned some positive interpersonal communication skills from one of the reporters."

Gorham says he made the opportunity happen for his own professional development and to enhance his annual report for tenure. His only writing on the experience was a consultant-like report for the news director commenting on many aspects of the station's newscasts.

Edward Arke is a faculty member in the Literature and Communication Department at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania. He completed a school-to-work experience this past summer, as well.

Funded by the Pennsylvania Association of Broadcasters (PAB), the fellowship program is designed to provide an opportunity for educational professionals to get back into the broadcast fields they teach first hand, allow an instructor to see theory in practice, help instructors better relate to students seeking similar opportunities, and introduce faculty members to contacts for current or future research projects.

Arke went to work at WGAL-TV in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for eight weeks after submitting a proposal and being chosen for funding by the PAB. His time at 'GAL reinforced theories such as the sliding definition of news, the importance of contingency plans, the necessity for quick-thinking, and the reality of rewriting rewrites.

"Each time I wrote a story, only to have the anchor rewrite the material to suit their style of presentation was a refreshing reminder that this principle is in use in the workplace today," Arke wrote in a concluding report to his fellowship sponsors.

Arke also reports learning some new material including the down-and-dirty significance and power of the television producer.

"I did not realize the extent of the producer's involvement until I had a chance to work with a few during this experience. The role of a television news producer is far more involved and integral to a newscast than theoretical discussions had led me to believe," Arke says.

Story development, intern involvement, and inter-office communication styles are other areas in which Arke reports picking up new beliefs and understanding. He suspects any or each may serve as a springboard for further academic research and examination as may the role of live reporting, the significance of news consultants.

"The opportunity at WGAL was a unique experience I could not duplicate elsewhere," Arke wrote in his summary report. "I feel better prepared to address issues and questions from students regarding television and television journalism."

METHODOLOLGY

News directors across North Carolina were surveyed (*survey attached*). North Carolina has six dominant television markets as defined and outlined by the Nielsen Company:

city/cities (market)	*Dominant Market Area rank*
Charlotte	28
Greensboro/High Point/Winston-Salem	46
Greenville/New Bern/Washington	106
Greenville (SC)/Spartanburg (SC)/Asheville	35
Raleigh/Durham	29
Wilmington	152

From Station Listing guide National Association of Television Programming Executives, Spring 1998

According to industry listings, there are 23 news operations at stations in those six markets, including newsrooms at ABC, CBS, NBC, UPN, FOX, WB, and PBS affiliates. Three of those operations are run in partnership, leaving twenty working news directors in the state. Each was mailed a survey on November 4, 1999. Reminder e-mails were sent on November 16 and again on November 24 to news directors who had not yet returned the completed survey. A second wave of surveys went out on Decmber 13 with a slightly different cover letter urging response. The final response rate to the survey was eleven, or 55%.

News directors in North Carolina were chosen as a representative sample of news directors across the country for this pilot study for reasons which included time and

money limitations and under the belief that they were more likely to respond to a survey coming from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The North Carolina markets also represented a fairly wide range of market sizes from 28 (Charlotte) to 152 (Wilmington).

It is hoped the research will show some trend of support for these classroom-to-newsroom experiences as well as indicate some path for making them increasingly beneficial for the news managers, the faculty participants, and, ultimately, for the students with whom the faculty work.

FINDINGS

Fifty- percent (10) of the news directors surveyed responded to the questions about managing mid-career interns. Not a single one reported having, now or at any other time or station, having such a person working in their newsroom. However, all agreed, one hundred percent, that, as described, such a program has merit.

"Young people who are seeking employment in TV news come to us poorly prepared for a real newsroom, " reports WBTV-TV/Charlotte News Director Ellen Miller. "Perhaps if we could train their professors, or help them keep up with the rapid changes in our industry, they could help prepare their students better. We need to improve the quality of the workforce."

Adds WCTI-TV/New Bern News Director Doug Spero, "The visiting professor or instructor can take back with him/her current trends and information that will apply first-hand to the students. It is a way for the students to get more of their money's worth."

Spero and Miller's comments both speak to the survey findings that, again, all of the respondents think it's important for college faculty teaching broadcast journalism to have continued access to the industry.

"(Such a program) greatly benefits the university because it allows the faculty member to get real world access to what's happening in today's newsroom," responded WWAY0-TV/Wilmington News Director Andrea Clenney.

"Faculty with real industry perspective; the key is current perspective, " says WLFL-TV/Raleigh/Durham News Director Jonathan Knopf.

Despite the strong support for a mid-career intern, only one news director surveyed says he could make such a "hiring" decision without any other authorization, such as a station general manager. Regardless, the real question seems to be what, exactly, such a faculty intern would be allowed to do. Half the respondents report they would immediately accept the faculty intern as a regular member of their ENG (electronic news gathering) staff. Seventy percent say they would offer the person a rotation of responsibilities that fit his or her needs, interests, and abilities. But only two of ten news directors specifically gave the green light to allowing the faculty intern to do on-air work.

"Accountability is the key issue," explains WXII-TV/Winston-Salem News Director Richard Moore. "If they are allowed to write, report, or otherwise control a work product, who is responsible for their mistakes? Regular employees have a stake in their jobs, an intern does not."

"(We) cannot have someone on-air for one month, then they disappear," says WLOS-TV/Asheville News Director Tom Loebig.

None of the news directors reported being willing to put such a temporary employee on the anchor desk.

"For the anchor desk, you need long term stability," explains New Bern's Spero.

Offered six work assignment possibilities from which to choose on the survey (*see table below*), six of the ten survey respondents say they would allow a faculty intern to work as a news writer or on the assignment desk.[1]

"For us, it's another body to help with phones and other desk-related tasks," says Moore of Winston-Salem. "There might be opportunities to do more than that, but only with very close supervision."

Half the responding news directors say the "more than that" could include work as a producer[2] or photographer.

possible ENG position/jobs for faculty intern	number of news directors* willing to assign to this post
Anchor	0
On-air reporter	2
Photographer	5
Producer	5
Writer	6
Assignment Editor	6

* Ten news directors responding to survey, all from North Carolina

In addition to the benefits already reported, several of the news directors surveyed made mention of strengthening station-school relationships as a benefit of such a

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[1] At most stations, the assignment editor is the person most directly involved in the dispatching of news crews around the station's coverage area. Typically, that person is working in an enclosed area behind a desk on which are piled phones, scanners, faxes, news releases, newspaper clippings, and assorted letters and notes. This person is the clearing-house for in-coming phone calls and communicates with roaming news crews via 2-way radio, pages, and cellular phones. The assignment desk is considered the nerve center, of sorts, of a news operation.

[2] At most stations, the newscast producer is the person most directly responsible for the content and flow of a singular newscast. This person coordinates coverage to include angles considered, sources contacted, and, ultimately, the accuracy of every report in his or her show. The producer is also responsible for the timing of the newscast and any added visual elements to include graphics and pre-produced story-telling components. The producer is the last gatekeeper for style and is in command during the actual broadcast regarding starting on time, ending on time, and monitoring all possible sources for any breaking news or changes to existing stories.

program. Specifically, they saw the potential for a quick and convenient line of referral opening up for students on the hunt for very competitive jobs.

Only two news directors offered any real reservations about trying such a faculty internship program in their newsrooms. Darren Richards, of WFMY-TV/Greensboro says such a program would require him to, "invest too much time in training without payoff."

Miller of Charlotte was concerned about the learning curve, saying stations computers and practices may prohibit any real contribution the faculty member could make in just four weeks. However, she adds, "if someone did this every year, they'd be familiar the next time back."

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Turning back to the research questions this study was aiming to answer, it appears obvious that, yes, news directors will welcome the wisdom and contributions of mid-career interns.

"I do think it is important for faculty to experience the industry often and up-close," says Vice President of News at WRAL-TV/Raleigh/Durham John Harris, a statement echoed by several other North Carolina news leaders.

This up-close observation and participation in modern newsroom could easily transfer to more effective teaching back on campus. The opportunity for college faculty to brush off some old skills (handling deadline pressure, fact gathering and processing, interviewing, shooting stand-ups), pick up some new skills (live shots, set pieces, tighter story element times, non-linear editing), collect new real-world teaching examples, and have fun, is sure to translate into a stronger and richer classroom experience.

Also obvious from the survey, news directors are likely to set limits as to the role and responsibilities they will afford mid-career interns. However, results do show there is a wide variety of potential opportunities for the faculty members willing to go from classroom to newsroom, from reporting to producing to writing. Any updated experiences, though, are bound to add to the product of teaching back on campus.

The potential difficulties for this kind of program, according to news directors surveyed revolve around time constraints, mostly, the effect time has on their audiences. The phenomenon of familiarity, or longevity, is somewhat unique to television and a big concern of news directors surveyed. Says Harris of Raleigh/Durham, "It seems that by design, this would turn into an extended 'shadowing' program that might be more useful in smaller market stations." Shadowing has its benefits, however, Gorham and Arke both expressed some disappointment at their lack of nitty-gritty, hands-on, time-in-the-trenches work. Perhaps then, the key is to, as Harris implies, concentrate on pursuing an opportunity where the potential is the highest for more of the kind of experience Gorham and Arke had hoped for. Here in North Carolina, with six dominant television markets as defined and outlined by the Nielsen Company (*see table below*), college faculty can do just that.

city/cities	*market #*
Charlotte	28
Raleigh/Durham	29
Greenville(SC)/Spartanburg (SC)/Asheville	35
Greensboro/High Point/Winston-Salem	46
Greenville/New Bern/Washington	106
Wilmington	152

source: Spring '98 NATPE Station Listing guide

The last research question this study was aiming to answer asks whether news directors think mid-career internships are valuable and important. Happily, it appears the answer is yes. "Nothing takes the place of practical experience," says Doug Spero of New Bern. "Tremendous benefit to future students," says Jonathan Knopf of Raleigh/Durham. "(A faculty internship program) will help us with teaching the new students/future employees on what it is 'really like out there,' not all just book information," adds Megan Drulard of WCNC-TV/Channel 36 in Charlotte. "It's an important reality check that's now too often missing among academics," concludes Winston-Salem news leader Richard Moore.

Missing no more, perhaps, or at least in fewer instances, if further research turns up this kind of support for continuing education programming for college faculty. Future research could widen the scope and breadth of this pilot study to gage interest nationwide. With organizations like the Knight Foundation on board backing the Radio Television News Directors Foundation's Project for Excellence in Journalism Education with nearly one million dollars, it should become more and more easy to match able faculty members with willing television stations.

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